

## SCIENCE

# Regional EPA Chief Says Agency Fired Him; Stoker Stands By His Doubts About Climate Change

By [Kevin Stark](#)  Feb 7



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Mike Stoker was dismissed this week from his position as the head of EPA Region 9. *(Danielle Venton/KQED)*

In an interview with KQED, Mike Stoker, the recently-fired regional administrator for the federal Environmental Protection Agency's San Francisco office, defended his expensive travels and remote management of the office from Southern California.

Stoker added that the time he spent surrounded by agency scientists did nothing to dispel his doubts about the scientific consensus about the human role in climate change.

He said he took a call from EPA brass Doug Benevento, associate deputy administrator, and Ryan Jackson, the agency's chief of staff, at 8 a.m. Wednesday.

"They said: 'Mike, effective end of today, we either need your resignation or we'll terminate you,'" he said.

Within five minutes, his EPA-issued phone and laptop were disconnected. Stoker said no one gave a reason for his firing, but he suggested that it had to do with praise he had received from Democrats for work in their communities.

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"You don't protect public health and environment in Democratic neighborhoods when you are Democratic president or in Republican neighborhoods when you are a Republican president, you do it everywhere," he said.

In a letter Stoker sent to his former staff on Thursday, he said U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had praised him for his work cleaning up contamination at Hunters Point and Rep. Scott Peters for sewage mitigation on the border between San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, among others.

EPA spokeswoman Corry Schiermeyer in Washington disputed that.

In a statement sent to the **Associated Press** Friday, Schiermeyer said it was normal for EPA regional bosses to "work in a bipartisan way."

Instead, the EPA spokeswoman pointed to what she said was excessive travel and poor decision-making.

"We ... had to relieve him for severe neglect and incompetent administration of his duties. His excuses and stories are simply all made up and we cannot allow them to go without response," Schiermeyer said in the statement.

When asked for a comment on Stoker's dismissal, Pelosi's office sent KQED a copy of a June 28, 2018 letter addressed from the Speaker to Stoker.

The letter read: "It was a pleasure to meet with you during your visit to the United States Capitol on June 27th. Many thanks for your commitment to the cleanup and transfer of the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. Your work to ensure public health, hold a transparent process that engages the public, and holding Tetra Tech accountable is critical and greatly appreciated."

EPA is overseeing the cleanup of chemicals and radiological material at the decommissioned Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco. Tetra Tech, a private engineering firm, had conducted fraudulent environmental testing. Two of its supervisors were sentenced to federal prison for falsifying documents related to those tests.

Stoker also suggested that disagreements with Benevento lay behind his dismissal.

"We have personalities that clash," he said. "But to take somebody out the way they took me out — turn off my cell phone and my laptop five minutes after hanging up with me — that only would make sense if there was just some compelling reason. Like, I would have been arrested the night before for spousal abuse or something just radical, bordering on criminal or inspector general. But none of that exists."

The EPA's inspector general had registered some reasons for concern. In 2018, the agency watchdog investigated a complaint that Stoker was traveling excessively and not spending much time at the San Francisco headquarters where the vast majority of his staff worked.

The inspector general found that Stoker spent more than \$43,000 of taxpayer money on 35 separate trips between May 2018 and February 2019. In March 2019, the inspector general issued a "management alert."

Stoker defended his travels as part of the job. "I can tell you right now a regional administrator is most effective if they are going out to where the issues are," he said. "You don't need a regional administrator who stays in the office."

About his decision to work from Los Angeles, Stoker said "it doesn't matter."

He oversaw EPA Region 9, which includes California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, the Pacific Islands and 148 tribes.

"Region 9 has 8 time zones, 50 million people," he said. "22 million of those people are in Southern California being served by the Los Angeles office."

On the issue of climate change, Stoker told KQED Science's Danielle Venton in June 2018 when he took the job that he personally believed that there were "questions on how much of it is man-made and how much of it is caused by Mother Nature."

When a reporter asked if his time working with EPA scientists changed his view on the issue, Stoker said it did not. "You have Mother Nature, from volcanoes to fires to — you know, you name it — that has an angle on global warming and you have man that has an angle on global warming."

Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals **show** that 97% or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree that global warming is a result of human activity.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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## PARKS

# State Park Plan Is Conservationist's Dream. But Reformers Want Focus on Neglected Neighborhoods

By [Kevin Stark](#)  Feb 4



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